

Remarks

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Thank you, Wes and your ECA, IIE and CIES colleagues for organizing such an outstanding orientation program.

Good afternoon, Fulbrighters! On behalf of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, I congratulate each of you on your selection to this prestigious program. What a fascinating region of the world you soon will be calling your home!

I have had the honor of serving as Vice Chair of the Fulbright Board for two years now, and the best part of my role is the opportunity to meet Fulbrighters.

The Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board is comprised of 12 private citizens who are appointed by the President of the United States to oversee and set policy for the Fulbright Program -- and to approve all Fulbright grants.

We will soon welcome former Congresswoman "Gabby" Giffords to the Board. Gabby was a Fulbright Student to Mexico in 1993. She has written that her Fulbright experience was, "a defining time" in her life.

Among my colleagues on the Board are university presidents, college professors, including one who happens to be blind, a former U.S. Ambassador, a former chief of staff to the First Lady of the United States, a business executive, a former U.S. marine who founded a school for orphans in Kenya, and a poet who teaches creative writing. The poet is our chairman.

The legislation establishing the Fulbright Program 65 years ago entrusted the policy setting and oversight to a private citizen board. We are the stewards of the goals and the values that Senator J. William Fulbright brilliantly imbued in the flagship program that bears his name -- and we take our role very seriously.

Members of the Fulbright Board approve finalist applications before the grants can be issued to ensure that the Program lives up to its high standard of excellence, open competition, and integrity.

With more than 155 countries participating in the Fulbright Program, and more than 8,000 U.S. and foreign Fulbright grants awarded each year, we spend a lot of time

thinking about how to attract not just the best and the brightest – but also those who will be the best citizen ambassadors for their country.

I had personally read many of the applications filed on behalf of those in this room, so I know firsthand what a remarkable group of emerging leaders we have here today.

Last year, I had the opportunity to speak at the 20th anniversary of the Fulbright program in Ukraine – where they have been grappling with education reform – so I am especially pleased to see so many of you going to Ukraine.

During your orientation, you are getting a lot of practical advice during your orientation. My advice to you is: **Go deep. Go wide. Go long.**

Go deep: Really get to know the community that has welcomed you. Experience the culture, learn the language. Immerse yourself. Spend time with your colleagues at the university or school where you teach or research. Understand what their lives are about. It will make such a difference -- both for you and them.

For at the same time that you are getting to know your hosts, they are getting to know you -- as a person. In some regions, the images locals have of Americans are the characters they see on screen or on TV.

A quick story – one of the visiting scientists attending the closing luncheon for Fulbrighters in the Science and Technology program had done his research at Caltech. I noted that Caltech is the “set” for the award winning TV show, **The Big Bang Theory**. He groaned. Rest assured, upon his return home to India, he will make sure people hear about the real Caltech.

Go wide: One of the Board’s priorities is **outreach** – at home and abroad, and both within the Fulbright community and far beyond it. We seek to highlight the Program’s impact and relevance to global peace and security.

Storytelling is at the heart of this outreach effort, that is, sharing and amplifying the discoveries, growth, experiences, encounters, pains, and triumphs of Fulbrighters around the globe.

As you set off to your new home, you are not going to remember much of what we say here today, but you **will** remember the stories told.

As Fulbrighters, you will have extraordinary reach and the potential to affect hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people in your host and home communities. We encourage you not only to seize every opportunity to engage in your new host community, but also to share your Fulbright experiences using every tool at your disposal.

- Whether you are a social media fan, or would be interviewed by “traditional” news media, or find opportunities to present American culture to your host community, **tell your story!**

- Whether through a YouTube video or a short story, or a poem, or a book about your adventures, ***tell your story!***
- Whether you write an essay, pen a letter, or send a postcard, ***tell your story!***

Fulbrighters have the advantage of having great material!

Like the Bees of Slovenia....

Meredith Turk, a U.S. Student Fulbrighter to Slovenia found the essence of “Slovenian-ness” in “the bees and the bee houses that pepper the landscape. And the honey.” She wrote:

“There are no words to describe the honey in this country. Some varieties are so clear and sweet and liquid it seems like water. Others are so thick and bitter and earthy you think you are drinking straight from a dark forest tree. In a country that touches so many cultures and landscapes – sea to mountain -- the bees show the variety in their honey.

The bees are sacred here. In a recent article, I described how Slovenians behold the bee: “In Slovene language there is a verb to signify the death of a human. This word is shared only with bees. For all other creatures there is a separate word.” And so, I set off to discover the beauty of this Balkan bee.

I travelled across the country meeting beekeepers. I tasted their honey and heard their stories, recording them as I went along with audio and photography. I met generations of beekeepers who have passed down this tradition... In my free time, I joined a mountaineering club which is a strong tradition in this alpine country... I learned how to scale mountains, ice climb, and ski... I immersed myself in Slovene, a painfully specific and beautiful language. I was even interviewed on national radio in Slovene after only four months of studying the language. I worked on a goat and sheep farm, learning about land use, agriculture and cheese making. I visited the beehive at my great grandmother’s home, and tasted the honey harvested by a distant cousin.

I will go back to Slovenia. It will be impossible not to. I am tied to this place now – my friends, the bees, the mountains.

Meredith’s story is one of the many that will be retold in the upcoming Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board Annual Report.

We talked about Going Deep and Going Wide. And now

Go Long; Your Fulbright lasts a lifetime.

I predict that your Fulbright Award will open doors for you, not just in academia but in your personal development, and in ways that you can't even imagine today. Simply put – it will change your life.

You are a member of a worldwide network – of more than 300,000 Fulbright Alumni since the Program began more than 65 years ago. Fulbright alumni have become world leaders on every continent – 18 have served as heads of state and one was Secretary General of the United Nations. And 43 were Nobel Laureates. A future one may be sitting right in this room.

There is a special bond between Fulbrighters – even if you have never met. They will open doors for you. You just need to reach out to them – ***as well as reach out to those who follow in your footsteps.***

After you return home, continue to collaborate with other Fulbrighters at home and abroad in your field of research – organize projects with them to help solve the world's most pressing problems.

Pollinate the world!

For as J. William Fulbright eloquently stated, “the essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy – the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see, or may see it more accurately. The simple purpose of the exchange program...is to erode the culturally rooted mistrust that sets nations against one another.”

Have a great time!

Thank you.